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THE VEDDAS

Things new to them which we showed.

152 them often provoked peals of laughter; to see the eldest and
 522 most venerable man solemnly have his thumb nail pressed by
 a brass machine (algometer) was particularly amusing to the
 rest of the community, one man actually rolling on the ground
 with laughter. The old man took it all in excellent part and
 smiled indulgently. Doubtless Veddas vary much in character,
 but all except the "show" Veddas are genial and courteous,
 and have always been rightly considered truthful. At Sitala
 153 Wanniya Handuna was the most intelligent man, keenly in-
 554 terested in all the new things we showed him; he obviously
 156 ruled the community by force of character, coupled with the
 fact that he was a shaman. Nila, however, was also a shaman,
 but he was obviously not so strong a man as Handuna, to whose
 opinion he deferred, and naturally took second place. Vela,
 half-brother of Handuna, was extremely shy but by no means
 stupid, he generally tried to get out of doing things, professing
 inability, but when urged by Handuna did everything as well
 as the other men. Kaira, *baena* (son-in-law) to Handuna, was
 intelligent and talkative and inclined to be boastful. Pema, *baena*
 to Nila, did not speak much, chiefly we thought because he was
 a young man and had not much to tell, for although he did not
 chatter like Kaira he smiled and did not hang his head when
 addressed, as Vela did.

342 Whether staying in a "private" or "communal" cave the
 592 family life continues in much the same manner. If in a com-
 621 munal cave, each family keeps strictly within its own limits,
 423 the women may always be seen at exactly the same spot, and
 when the men come in they sit or lie beside their wives,
 keeping to that part of the cave floor that belongs to them
 as carefully as though there was a partition dividing it from
 that of their neighbours. Figure 2 is a plan of Pihilegodagalge
 showing the actual division of floor space. Food is frequently
 621 cooked by one woman and shared by all the members of
 422 the community, in fact, although it might be cooked separately,
 it did not seem that any food was private property. One
 other fact was very noticeable in communal caves, namely,
 that men never kept their bows and arrows in their own
 division, but always put them all together in a particular

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place.) The "arsenal" at Bendiyaalge is well seen in Plate XIX, figures 1 and 2, while at Pihilegodagalge all the bows and arrows were rested on an old ant heap in the centre of the cave.

Though men do sometimes dig for yams, hunting is essentially their work, and yams were usually dug by the women who also do the cooking. This is of the simplest kind; yams are roasted in ashes, in which way meat may also be cooked, while practically everything else is boiled in a pot over three stones. Many Veddas also know how to cook curry, and deer's flesh is dried on a rack and smoked. A rack is built usually in a sunny place, the meat is put on this and a smoky fire kept burning beneath it, the flesh is thus dried in the sun and smoked simultaneously. This process is usually superintended by men.

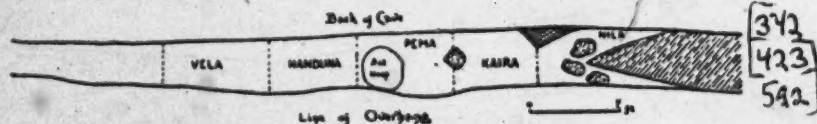


Fig. 3. Plan of Pihilegodagalge.

Plate XVII, figure 1, shows a rack built to smoke meat on the top of the Bendiyaalge rock-mass.

A Vedda will never sleep on the ground if there is any rock upon which he can lie. If he has a deerskin or a piece of cloth he will lie on it, if not he does not seem to object to the cold rock, and so avoids contact with the ground damp from the heavy dews. He always keeps a small fire burning beside him; this was noticed by Nevill, who says: "A Vaedda never sleeps without a smouldering fire by his side. I am assured, should accident oblige them to do so, they have usually died from a fever caught by the omission¹."

The Veddas are strictly monogamous, and we were able to confirm Bailey's observations as regards their marital fidelity. Their constancy to their wives is a very remarkable trait in their character in a country where conjugal fidelity is certainly not classed as the highest of domestic virtues. Infidelity,

¹ *Tapehonian*, Vol. 1, Aug. 1886, p. 187.

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guards it, sleeping always at his master's head. 'What would you do,' I asked a Veddah once, 'if your bow were stolen?' 'No one could steal it,' he replied, 'the dog would not let him.' 'But if anyone killed your dog?' His answer was significant. He clutched his axe, and made a motion as though he would cut down the man who did so.

"And this was no idle threat. In 1849, a Bintenne Veddah deliberately knocked a man's brains out for having, as he believed, killed two of his dogs by magic¹. He never attempted to deny what he had done. 'It is true,' he said at the coroner's inquest, 'I killed him, and I did so because he had killed, by witchcraft, the two dogs I had reared and hunted for my support!'"

The following is a list of the names of dogs and bitches obtained from the Henebedda Veddas:

Dogs. Kapura, Kadiya (*kadi*, black ant), Muranduwa (obstinate), Hudena (white), Pandina (spotty), Dimbula, Boriya, Taniya, Tambula, Senba, Katakaluwa (black mouth), Bahira, Pulana, Kambiliya, Komiya (a Sinhalese corruption of "come here," the name of a dog belonging to the Korale of Nilgala).

Bitches. Pandi (spotty), Katakalu (black mouth), Handani (white), Dassi (clever), Dimbile, Makedi (like iron), Bosari, Hudu Valli, Mukulu.

The following list represents the usual property of an elderly Veddah, that is, of one of the influential men of the group, and actually records the property of Poromala (Walaha) the "senior" of the Henebedda Veddas; one axe, bow and arrows, three pots, a deerskin, a "flint and steel" and supply of tinder, a gourd for carrying water, a betel pouch containing betel cutters and some form of vessel or small box, perhaps of metal (e.g. an old brass covered cartridge case), for holding lime. Most Veddas also possess a certain amount of cloth besides that actually in use on their person, and Handuna was no exception to this rule.

Kaira of Henebedda had only two pots, but otherwise the list of his property is identical with that already given. Handuna

¹ "The murdered man was not a Veddah, but a low-country vagrant; several of whom have of late years, taken up their abode near the Bintenne Veddas, to their great annoyance."

² Bailey, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-187.

422 of Sitala Wanniya had three dogs, an axe, bow and arrow, one pot, betel bag, betel cutters, "flint and steel" and gourd for carrying tinder.

428 It seemed that adult sons inherited most of their fathers' personal property, but certainly the sons-in-law had the right to receive something. We have no doubt that what actually occurs, or until recently occurred, is that the adult children and the sons-in-law talked over and decided who should have each article of property, the whole being fairly shared; or if the sons-in-law were well provided with goods the whole of the dead man's property might go to his sons; thus Poromala (Walaha) told us that when his father died, leaving an axe, a bow and arrows, a deerskin, "flint and steel" and a betel bag with accessories, he took the axe and bow and arrows, leaving the other articles to his brother Handuna. Poromala added that as elder brother the division of the property was his affair. When Poromala dies his property will be divided among his children, and it appeared that his eldest child, his daughter Tuti and her husband, would take the leading part in the distribution of his personal property. Handuna of Sitala Wanniya says that his property will be divided as follows; he has three dogs, each of his two sons and his *baena* will take one of these; his axe and bow and arrows will be divided between his sons; his son-in-law will take his strike-a-light and his wife his betel bag and its appurtenances and probably his pots. Handuna added that his landed property would naturally go to his sons, but pointed out that his *baena* had a right to demand any personal property he cared to have, though no *baena* would behave unfairly or badly to his father-in-law's sons.

At Godatalawa, where Handuna the "senior" of the group had no adult sons, it was said that his dog, axe and bow and arrows would be divided between his sons-in-law; his betel bag and his deerskin would go to his son, a boy of eight or ten, who would also take his rice mortar and divide his father's pots with his *baena*. From these examples, it will be clear that a man's personal property is fairly equally divided between his children, the daughters' shares being often nominally given to their husbands.

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In concluding these remarks on property we may refer to the list given by Rutimeyer (*Globus* 1903) of Vedda objects of personal property in the Basle Museum, these are: 422

- (i) Bow and ordinary arrows with iron heads of different sizes.
- (ii) Elephant arrows (i.e. ceremonial arrows or *aude*).
- (iii) Simple sharpened wood arrows.
- (iv) Boy's bow with wooden arrows, being an exact facsimile of the iron tipped arrows.
- (v) Axes.
- (vi) Digging sticks.
- (vii) Drill for producing fire.
- (viii) Apron made of the bast of *Antiaris toxicaria* (*rifi* bark).
- (ix) Tortoise shell from the Danigala used as a dish.
- (x) Disc of wax from wild bees (trading-asset).
- (xi) Ball of bast cord for bow strings.
- (xii) Fire lighting appliances with hollowed areca nut for keeping tinder.
- (xiii) Earthenware pot hanging in a bast net.
- (xiv) Pouch made of squirrel skin.
- (xv) Kilt made of leaves.

To this Rutimeyer would add a *rifi* bark bag, the message stick referred to in the anonymous report of 1820, printed by Le Mesurier¹, and clay figures and marbles mentioned by Stevens, in order to have "a rather complete inventory of all utensils of the 'Nature Veddae'." This list, however, omits dried deer skins and the skin and wooden honey-collecting utensils described in Chapter XI. Further, no mention is made of beads, which are certainly much appreciated by even the wilder Veddas (cf. Chapter XI).

¹ "The Veddas of Ceylon," by C. J. R. Le Mesurier, *Journal Roy. As. Soc., Ceylon Branch*, Vol. 12, 1886. The statement referred to will be found on p. 347 and runs as follows:—"They are totally unacquainted with letters, but the different tribes hold a rude correspondence with each other with small pieces of wood cut into different shapes. Fugitives used to be furnished with passports of this kind, when they removed from one tribe to another, and the treatment they received depended on the recommendation which the tallaman conveyed."

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But dogs are still prized by the Veddah. Of all his possessions, he values most his bow, which is placed under his head when he sleeps; and next in his estimation is the dog who guards it, sleeping always at his master's head. "What would you do," I asked a Veddah once, "if your bow were stolen?" "No one could steal it," he replied; "the dog would not let him." "But if any one killed your dog." His answer was significant. He clutched his axe, and made a motion as though he would cut down the man who did so. (685)

And this was no idle threat. In 1849, a Bintenne Veddah deliberately knocked a man's brains out, for having, as he believed, killed two of his dogs by magic.* He never attempted to deny what he had done. "It is true," he said at the coroner's inquest, "I killed him, and I did so because he had killed, by witchcraft, the two dogs I had reared and hunted with for my support." He added, as quite a secondary justification, that the murdered man had also practised his magic arts on himself. He detailed, with great minuteness, how he lay wait for him, and how, while he, with his wife and child, was resting in the shade, he watched his opportunity, and felled him with a club: and—strong evidence of the proverbial truthfulness of the Veddahs—he described how, by his influence (he was the head man of one of the small tribes), he intimidated the widow and father of his victim, and so kept the murder secret for some days. (648, 695, 754)

None but the woman saw the deed; and had falsehood been the normal characteristic of the Veddahs, as I fear it is with too many of their more civilized contemporaries, he would probably have escaped punishment. He was tried and convicted of murder, but the sentence of death was commuted to several years imprisonment. It was hoped that, having received some instructions in goal, he might carry back with him some little civilization to his own people. (648)

But imprisonment was to him a greater punishment than death. He pined away in confinement, and was released to save his life. I have often seen him in Bintenne. Civilization has not done much for him. He differs from his brethren only in having acquired a taste for jewelry, for he wears with apparent pride, a tawdry brass chain round his waist. (301)

The Veddahs eat the flesh of elk,† deer, monkeys, pigs, the iguano, and pangolin—all flesh, indeed, but that of oxen, elephants, (262)

* The murdered man was not a Veddah, but a low-country vagrant; several of whom have, of late years, taken up their abode near the Bintenne Veddahs, to their great annoyance.

† What is commonly termed an elk in Ceylon, is the Samba deer (*rusa Ariatolus*). (136)